

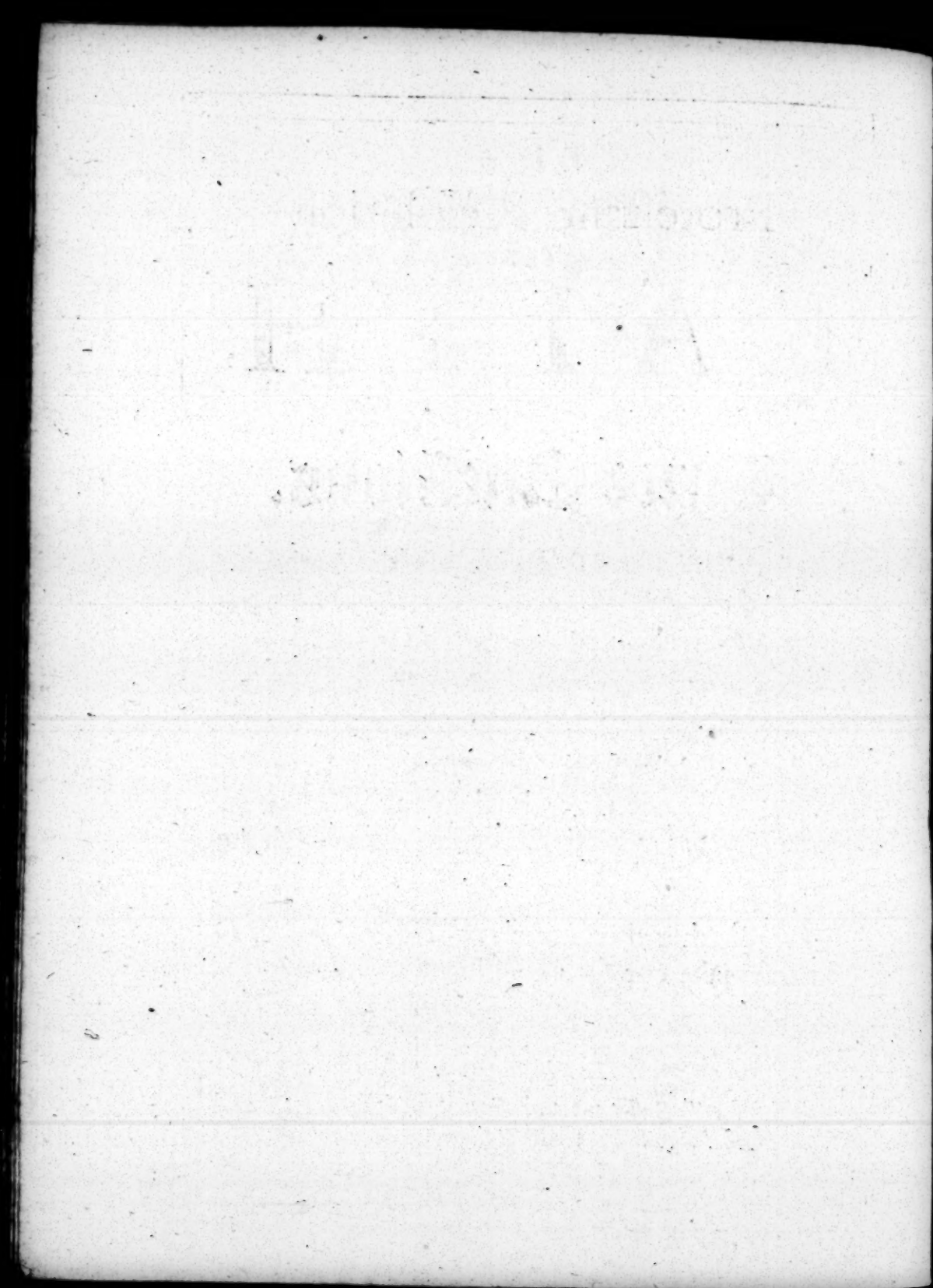
THE
Protestant Resolution
OF
F A I T H,
Being an Answer to
Three Questions.

- I. How far we must depend on the Authority of the Church for the true Sense of Scripture?
- II. Whether a Visible Succession from Christ to this day makes a Church, which has this Visible Succession, an Infallible Interpreter of Scripture; And whether no Church, which has not this Succession, can teach the true Sense of Scripture?
- III. Whether the Church of *ENGLAND* can make out such a Visible Succession?

By W. Sherlock

L O N D O N :

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THE
PREFACE
TO THE
READER.

These Papers, which are here presented to thee, were writ for the use of a private Person, and by the Advice of some Friends, are now made Publick. We find how busy the Romish Emissaries are to corrupt our People, and think our selves equally concerned to Antidote them against Popery and Fanaticism: Two extreams equally dangerous to the Government of Church and State in these Kingdoms, both in their Principles and Practices; and both of them very great Corruptions of the Christian Religion, and very dangerous to mens Souls. Some of our Clergy have already been so charitable to our Dissenters, as to warn them of their danger; and by the Strength and Evidence of Scripture and Reason, to Convince them of their mistakes; and I pray God forgive those men, and turn their Hearts, who will not contribute so much to their own Conviction and Satisfaction, as diligently and impartially to read and consider what is so charitably offered to them. Ignorance and mistake may excuse men, who have no opportunities of knowing better, but such wilful and resolved Ignorance, which bars up mens minds against all

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*means of better Information , will as soon damn them, as
sins against knowledge.*

*And now it might justly be thought want of Charity
to those of the Roman Communion, should we take no
care at all of them; nay, want of Charity to those of
our own Communion, and to Dissenters themselves, who
are daily assaulted by the busie Factors for Rome. For
the Disputes against the Church of Rome, as well as
against Dissenters, are for the most part too Learned,
and too Voluminous for the instruction of ordinary people,
and therefore some short and plain Discourses about the
principal Matters in dispute between us, is the most ef-
fectual way we can take to confirm men in their Religion,
and preserve them from the crafty insinuations of such as
lie in wait to deceive.*

*Some few Attempts, which have been already made
of that kind, give me some hope, that several other
Tracts will follow, that the Ruine of the Church of Eng-
land (if God shall please ever to permit such a thing)
whether by Popery, or Fanaticism, may not be charged
upon our neglect to instruct People better.*

*Some Persons, it seems, whose Talent lies more in
censuring what others do, than in doing any good them-
selves, are pleased to put some sinister Constructions on
this Design; as it is impossible to design any thing so
well, but men of Ill Minds, who know not what it means
to do good for goods sake, shall be able to find some bad
name for it. Some guess that we now write against Po-
pery only to play an after-game, and to regain the Favour
and good Opinion of Dissenters, which we have lost by
writing against them: But I know not that any man has
lost*

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lost their Favour by it, nor that any man values their Favour for any other Reason, than to have the greater advantage of doing them good. If so good a work, as confuting the Errors of the Church of Rome, will give the Dissenters such a good Opinion of us, as to make them more impartially consider what has been writ to perswade them to Communion with the Church of England, I know no reason any man has to be ashamed to own it, though it were part of his design; but whether it is or not, is more than I know; I dare undertake for those Persons I am acquainted with, that they neither value the Favour, nor fear the Displeasure either of Fanaticks or Papists, but yet heartily desire to do good to them both.

But there is a more mischievous suggestion than this, that the design of such Papers is only to raise a new cry and noise about Popery, and to alarm the People, and disturb the Government with new Fears and Jealousies: Truly, if I thought this would be the effect of it, I would burn my Papers presently; for I am sure the Church of England will get nothing by a Tumultuary and Clamorous Zeal against the Church of Rome, and I had much rather suffer under Popery, than contribute any thing towards raising a Popular Fury to keep it out. We profess our selves as irreconcilable Enemies to Popery, as we are to Fanaticism, and desire that all the World may know it; but we will never Rebel, nor countenance any Rebellion against our Lawful Sovereign, to keep out either, we leave such Principles and Practices to Papists and Fanaticks. But when we find our People Assaulted by the Agents of Rome, and do not think our selves secure from Popish Designs, we think it our Duty to give them the best instructions we can

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to preserve them from such Errors, as we believe will destroy their Souls; and cannot but wonder, that any men, who are as much concerned to take care of Souls as we are, should think this a needless or a scandalous undertaking. I wish such men would speak out, and tell us plainly, what they think of Popery themselves. If they think this Design not well managed, by those who undertake it, it would more become them to commend the Design, and do it better themselves; I know no man, but would very gladly be excused, as having other work enough to employ his time, but yet I had rather spend my vacant minutes this way, than in censuring the good that other men do, while I do none myself.

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The Words of the Paper, which was sent to me, are these :

I*T is my Opinion, that the infinite Goodness of our Legislator, has left to us a means of knowing the true sense and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, which is the Church : Now I judge this Church must be known to be the true Church, by its continual visible Succession from Christ till our Days. But I doubt whether or no the Protestant Church can make out this continual visible Succession, and desire to be informed.*

A N S W E R.

T**HAT** Christ has left a means of knowing the true sense and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, I readily grant ; or else it had been to no purpose to have left us the Scriptures. But the latter Clause is very ambiguous, for the meaning may either be, that we may understand by the Scriptures, which is the Church ; or that the Church is the means whereby we must understand the true sense and meaning of the Scripture.

The first is a true Protestant Principle, and therefore I presume not intended by this Objector. For how we should know that there is any Church without the Information we receive by the Scripture, I cannot Divine ; and yet we may as easily know that there is a Church, as we can know which is the true Church without the Scripture. For there is no other means of knowing either that there is a Church, or what this Church is, or what are the Properties of a True and Sound and Orthodox Church, but by Revelation, and we have no other Revelation of this, but what is contained in the Holy Scriptures.

As for the Second, That the Church is the means of knowing

ing the true sense and meaning of the Scriptures, it is in some sense very true, in some sense very false.

1. It is in some sense true, and acknowledged by all sober Protestants. As, 1. If by the Church we understand the Universal Church of all Ages, as we receive the Scriptures themselves handed down by them to our time, so whatever Doctrines of Faith have been universally received by them, is one of the best means to find out the true sense of Scripture. For the nearer they were to the times of the Apostles, the more likely they were to understand the true sense of their Writings, being instructed by the Apostles themselves in the meaning of them. And thus we have a certain Rule to secure us from all dangerous Errors in expounding Scripture. For the great and Fundamental Doctrines of the Christian Religion, are as plainly contained in the Writings of the first Fathers of the Church, and as unanimously asserted by them, as the Authority of the Scriptures themselves: And therefore though we have not a Traditionary Exposition of every particular Text of Scripture: yet we have of the great and Fundamental Doctrines of Faith, and therefore must never expound Scripture so as to contradict the known and avowed sense of the Catholick Church. And this course the Church of *England* takes; she receives the Definitions of the four first General Councils, and requires her Bishops and Clergy to Expound the Scriptures according to the profest Doctrines of those first and purest Ages of the Church.

2. We ought to pay great deference to, and not lightly and wantonly oppose the Judgment and Authority of the particular Church wherein we live, when her Expositions of Scripture do not evidently and notoriously contradict the sense of the Catholick Church, especially of the first and best Ages of it. For it does not become private men to oppose their Sentiments and Opinions to the Judgment of the Church, unless in such plain Cases, as every honest man may be presumed a very Competent Judge in the matter; and no Church, nor all the Churches in the World have such Authority, that we must renounce our Senses, and deny the first principles of Reason, to follow them with a blind and implicate Faith.

And thus the Church, that is, the Sense and Judgment of the Catholick Church, is a means for the finding out the true sense of Scripture; and though we may mistake the sense of some

some particular Texts , (which the *Romanists* themselves will not deny , but that even infallible Councils may do , who though they are infallible in their Conclusions, yet are not always so in the Arguments or Mediums , whether drawn from Scripture or Reason, whereby they prove them) yet it is morally impossible we should be guilty of any dangerous mistake, while we make the Catholick Doctrine of the Church our Rule ; and in other matters follow the Judgment, and submit to the Authority of the Church wherein we live ; which is as absolutely necessary, as Peace and Order , and good Government in the Church.

2. But then this is very false , if we mean that the Church is the onely means of finding out the true sense of the Scriptures ; or if by the Church we understand any particular Church , as I suppose this person does , the *Roman* Catholick, that is, the particular Universal Church of *Rome* ; or if we mean the Church of the present Age , or by Means understand, such a Decretory Sentence, as must determine our Faith , and command our Assent ; that we must seek for no other Reason of our Faith , but the Authority of the Church in expounding Scriptures. I shall discourse something briefly of each of these.

1. To say that the Church is the only Means to find out the true sense of Scripture, is very false and absurd. For , 1. This supposes the Holy Scriptures to be a very unintelligible Book , which is a great reproach to the Holy Spirit , by which it was Indited , that he either could not , or would not speak intelligible to the World.

2. This is a direct Contradiction to those Exhortations of Christ and his Apostles to study the Scriptures, which were made to private men , and therefore necessarily supposes , that the Holy Scriptures are to be understood as other Writings are, by considering the Propriety of the Words and Language wherein they are written , the Scope and Design of the place , and such other means , as honest and studious Inquirers use to find out the meaning of any other Book.

3. If the Scriptures are so unintelligible, that an honest man cannot find out the meaning of them , without the infallible interpretation of the Church , I would desire to know whether Christ and his Apostles Preached intelligibly to their Hearers ?

If they did not, to what purpose did they Preach at all? By what means were men Converted to the Faith? If they did, how come these Sermons to be so unintelligible now they are written, which were so intelligible when they were spoken? For the Gospels contain a plain History of what Christ did, and of what he said; and the Apostles wrote the same things to the Churches when they were absent, which they Preached to them when they were present: and we reasonably suppose, that they as much designed that the Churches should understand what they Wrote, as what they Preached, and therefore that they generally used the same form of words in their Writing and in their Preaching: And this makes it a great Riddle, how one should be very plain and easie to be understood, and the other signifie nothing without an infallible Interpreter.

4. If the Scriptures be in themselves unintelligible, I would desire to know how the Church comes to understand them? If by any humane means, together with the ordinary Assistances of the Divine Spirit, then they are to be understood, and then why may not every Christian in proportion to his Skill in Languages, and in the Rules of Reason and Discourse, understand them also?

If the Church cannot understand the Scriptures by any humane means, but only by Inspiration, (for there is no Medium between these two) to what purpose were the Scriptures written? For we might as well have learnt the will of God from the Church, without the Scriptures, as with them. God could have immediately revealed his will to the Church without a written Rule, as well as reveal the meaning of that written Rule, which it seems has no signification at all, till the Church, by Inspiration, gives an Orthodox meaning to it.

5. And if we cannot understand the Scriptures, till the Church Expounds them to us, how shall we know, which is the Church, and that this Church is such an infallible Interpreter of Scriptures? The Church is to be known only by the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are to be understood only by the Church; if we will know the Church, we must first understand the Scriptures, and if we will understand the Scriptures, we must first know the Church, and when both must be known first, or we can know neither, it is impossible in this way, either to understand the Scriptures, or find out the Church.

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For, suppose the Church does expound Scripture by Inspiration, how shall we be assured that it does so? Must we believe every Man, or every Church, which pretends to Inspiration? This is a contradiction to the Apostles Rule, not to believe every Spirit, but to try the Spirits. How then shall they be tried? I know but two ways, either by Miracles, or by Scripture. Miracles are now ceas'd, unless we will believe some fabulous Legends, which all wise men in the Church of *Rome* are ashamed of; and if there were real Miracles wrought, they are of no Authority against a standing Rule of Faith, which the Apostle calls a more sure word of Prophecie. If then we must judge of these pretences to Revelation by the Scriptures, which is the onely way now left, then there is a way of understanding the Scriptures without this Revelation: for if we must understand the Scriptures by Revelation, and Revelation by the Scriptures, we are got into a new Circle, and can understand neither.

Obj. But do we not see how many Schisms and Heresies have been occasioned, by suffering every one to Expound Scripture for himself? How many Divisions and Sub-divisions are there among Protestants, who agree in little else, besides their opposition to Popery? And is it possible to cure this, without an Infallible Interpreter of Scriptures? Is it not a Contradiction to common Experience, to say, that the sence of Scripture is plain and certain, when so few men can agree what it is?

Ans. 1. Yes, we do see this, and lament it, and are beholden to the Church of *Rome*, and her Emisaries, in a great measure for it. But yet we know, thus it has been in all Ages of the Christian Church, as well as now; and we take the same way to confute these Heresies, and to preserve the Purity of the Faith, and the Unity of the Church, which the Primitive Fathers did, by appealing to Scripture, and the Doctrine and Practice of the Catholick Church, which is the best way any Church can take, when there is no Infallible Judge of Controversies: And if the Primitive Church had known any such Infallible Judge, they would certainly have appealed to him, at one time or other; and it had been impossible, that any Errours or Heresies should for any long time together have disturbed the Church; but we hear nothing of him for many

hundred years after Christ ; but the ancient Fathers took the same way to confute the Heresies of their days, which we do now, which is a good probable Argument, that they knew no better. And the present Divisions of the Christian Church, are no greater Argument against us, than the Ancient Heresies were against the Primitive Church, or than the Protestant Heresies (as they are pleased to call them) are against the Church of *Rome* ? For what advantage has the Church of *Rome* upon this account, above any other Profession of Christians. Those who are of the same Communion, are of the same Mind. Thus it is among us, and it is no better among them ; for we are no more of their mind, than they are of ours : nay, notwithstanding all their pretences to Infallibility, most of the Disputes which divide the Protestant Churches, are as fairly disputed among themselves, witness the famous Controversie between the *Jansenists* and *Molinists* ; which their infallible Judge never thought fit to determine to this day : They live indeed in the Communion of the same Church, notwithstanding these Disputes, because it is a very dangerous thing to leave it ; but they are more beholden to the Inquisition, than to Infallibility for this Unity.

2. How do these Divisions and Heresies, which disturb the Church, prove, that no man can be certain of his Religion ? If we can certainly know what the sence of Scripture is, notwithstanding there are many different Opinions about it, then the diversity of Opinions is no Argument against us ; if we cannot be certain of any thing, which others deny, dispute, or doubt of, then how can any Papist be certain that his Church is infallible ? For all the rest of the Christian Church deny this, and scorn their Pretensions to it. I may indeed safely acquiesce in the Determinations of an Infallible Judge, whom I am infallibly assured to be infallible, how many contrary Opinions soever there are in the World : But when Infallibility it self is the matter of the Dispute, and I have no infallible way to know whether there be any such thing, or where this Infallibility is seated, if diversity of Opinions be an Argument against the certainty of any thing, which I am not, and cannot be infallibly assured of, then it is a certain demonstration against Infallibility it self.

Unless we will take the Church of *Rome*'s word for her own Infallibility,

Infallibility, we cannot have the Decision of an Infallible Judge in this matter; for she will allow no other Infallible Judge, but her self: and yet this is so absurd a way, that it supposes, that we believe, and that we dis-believe the same thing at the same time. For unless we before-hand believe the Church to be infallible, her saying so is no infallible proof that she is infallible; and yet the very demand of a proof supposes that we are not certain of it, that we doubt of it, or dis-believe it. When we ask the Church whether she be infallible, it supposes that we are not certain of it, otherwise we should need no proof; and when we believe the Church to be infallible, because she says so, it supposes, that we did before-hand believe that she is infallible, otherwise her saying so is no proof.

The greatest Champions for the Church of *Rome*, never pretended that they could produce any infallible proofs, which is the true Church. Cardinal *Bellarmino* attempts no more, than to alledge some Motives of Credibility, to make the thing probable, and to incline men to believe it; and yet it is impossible we can be more certain of the Infallibility of the Church, than we are, that it is a true Church; and if a Papist have onely some motives of Credibility, to believe the Church of *Rome* to be a true Church, he can have no greater probabilities, that it is an infallible Church.

Now not to take notice what a tottering Foundation some high probabilities, though they amounted to a moral assurance, is for the belief of Infallibility, which is to put more in the Conclusion than there is in the Premises. The onely use I shall make of it at present, is this: That we can at least be as certain of the meaning of Scripture, as the Papists are, that their Church is infallible; for they can be no more infallibly assured of this, than we are of our interpretations of Scripture: and therefore, if the diversity of Opinions about the sense of Scriptures, proves that we cannot be certain what the true sense of it is, the same Argument proves, that they cannot be certain that their Church is infallible, because this is not onely doubted, but absolutely denied by the greatest part of the Christian World, and was never thought of by the best and purest Ages of it. So that this Argument proves too much, and recoils upon themselves, like a Gun which is over-charged; and if, for their own sakes, they will grant that we may be certain of some things, which
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are as confidently denied, and disputed by others; then the diversity of Opinions in the Church, is no Argument, that we cannot be certain of our Religion, but onely teaches us greater Caution, and Diligence, and Honesty, in our inquiries after Truth.

3. These Divisions and Heresies that are in the Christian Church, are no better Argument against the truth and certainty of our Religion, than the diversities of Religions that are in the World, are against the truth of Christianity. The whole World is far enough from being Christian; great part of it are *Jews*, or *Pagans*, or *Mahumetanes* still; and this is as good an Argument to prove the uncertainty of all Religions, as the different Parties and Professions of Christians are to prove, that we cannot be certain, what the true Christian Church, nor what true Christianity is. The Gospel of our Saviour was not designed to offer any force or violence to mens Faith or Understanding, no more than to their Wills. Were there such an irresistible and compulsory Evidence in the Gospel, that where-ever it were preach'd, it should be impossible for any man, though never so wicked and ill-disposed, to continue an Infidel; or to prove a Heretick, Faith would be no greater a Virtue, than forc'd Obedience and Compliance is. The Gospel has Evidence enough to Convince honest Minds, and is plain enough to be understood, by those who are honest and teachable; and therefore has its Effects upon those who are Curable, which is all that it was designed for. Those, who will not believe, may continue Infidels, and those who will not understand, may fall into Errours, and believe a Lye; and yet there is Evidence enough to Convince, and Plainness enough to Instruct well-disposed Minds, and Certainty enough in each to be the Foundation of a Divine Faith.

The sum is this: Though the Instructions of the Church are a very good means for the understanding of the sence of Scripture, yet they are not the onely means, the Holy Scripture is a very intelligible Book, in such matters as are absolutely necessary to Salvation; and could we suppose, that a man, who had never heard of a Church, should have the use of the Bible, in a Language which he understood, by a diligent reading of it, he might understand enough to be saved.

2. If by Church is meant any particular Church; as suppose

pose the *Roman* Catholick Church, or the Church of the present Age, it is absolutely false to say, that the Church, in this sense, is always a sure and safe means of understanding the Scripture. What has been Universally believed by all Christian Churches, in all Ages, or at least, by all Churches of the first and purest Ages of Christianity, which were nearest the times of the Apostles, and might be presumed best to understand the sense of the Apostles in the great Articles of our Faith, is a very safe Rule for the interpretation of Scripture; and the general Practice of those Primitive Apostolick Churches, in matters of Government and Discipline, before they were corrupted by worldly Ambition, and secular interest, is a very safe Rule for our Practice also, and this is the Rule whereby our Church is reformed, and to which we appeal.

There are but three things necessary to be understood by Christians, either the Articles of Faith, or the Rules of Life, or the external Order and Discipline of the Church, and Administration of Religious Offices.

1. As for the Rules of Life, all those Duties which we owe to God and Men, they are so plainly contained in the Holy Scriptures, that no honest man can mistake them; I suppose the Church of *Rome* her self, will not pretend, that there is any need of an infallible interpreter to teach men what is meant by Loving God with all our Heart, and our Neighbour as our selves.

2. As for the Articles of Faith, those which are Fundamental to the Christian Religion, and which every Christian ought to believe, are so plain in Scripture, that every honest and unprejudiced man may understand them; but however, as I observed before, we govern our selves in these things by the received Doctrine of the Catholick Church of the first and purest Ages, and if this be not a safe Rule, we can be certain of nothing. And what the Catholick Faith was, we learn from those short summaries of Faith, which were universally owned by all Catholick Churches. For what we now call the Apostles Creed, was very anciently received in all Churches, with some little variety indeed of Words and Phrase, but without any difference of sense; and the Catholick Faith was not only preserved in such short Summaries and Creeds, which were as liable to be perverted by Hereticks,

Hereticks, as the Scriptures themselves, but was more largely explained in the Writings of the ancient Fathers; and though this will not enable us to understand every Phrase and Expression of Scripture, but we must use other means to do that, as Skill in the Original Languages, a knowledge of ancient Customs, and ancient Disputes, to which the Apostles frequently allude, a consideration of the Scope and Design of the place, &c. Yet the Catholick Faith received and owned by the Primitive Church, is so far a Rule, as it directs us to Expound Scripture to a true Catholick sense. As *St. Paul* commands the *Romans*, that those who prophesie, should Prophecie according to the proportion of Faith, *Rom. 12. 6.* Κατ' ἀναλογίαν πίστεως, according to the Analogy of Faith: That is, that in the interpreting the Scriptures of the Old Testament, they should expound them to a Christian sense, according to those Doctrines of the Christian Faith, which he had taught them; and this was a safe Rule for expounding the Old Testament, which contained the Types, and Figures, and Prophecies of the Gospel-State. And thus in expounding the New Testament, now it is committed to writing, we must Prophecie according to the Analogy of Faith, or as he commands *Timothy* in his Preaching, hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard from me. *2 Tim. 1. 13.* It seems the Apostle had given him a form of sound words, according to which he was to direct his Preaching; whether this refers to a short summary of Faith, such as our Creed is, I cannot say, though it is not improbable it may; but it is plain, we have a form of sound words delivered to us by the Catholick Church, which contains the true Catholick Faith, and therefore ought to be so far a Rule to us in expounding Scripture, as never to contradict any thing which is contained in it, for that is to contradict the Faith of the Catholick Church.

And when one great Article of this Faith, concerning the Eternal God-head of Christ the Son of God, was corrupted by *Arius*, a Presbyter of the Church of *Alexandria*, it gave an occasion for a more full Declaration of the sense of the Catholick Church about it. And though the effects of that Controversie were very fatal to the Church, yet it was very happy that it broke out in such an Age, when it could be determined with greater certainty and greater Authority, than it could have been
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in any succeeding Age of the Church ; by men, who were venerable for their Age, for their Wisdom, for their Piety, for their undaunted Confessions under Heathen and Persecuting Emperours, who knew what the sense of the Catholick Church was, before this Controversie broke out, and before External Prosperity had, through ease and wantonness, corrupted the Faith, as well as the Manners of Christians.

3. As for matters of External Order, Discipline, and Government, the Universal Practice of the Catholick Church is the best and safest Comment on those general Rules and Directions we have laid down in Scripture. There is no doubt at all, but the Apostles did appoint Governours, and Rules of Order and Discipline, in the Churches planted by them ; what these were, the Christians of those days saw with their Eyes, in the daily practice of the Church ; and therefore the Apostles in those Epistles which they wrote to their several Churches, did not give them so punctual and particular account of those matters, which they so well knew before, but as occasion served, make only some accidental mention of these things, and that in such general terms, as were well enough understood by them, who knew the practice of the Church in that Age, but it may be, cannot meerly by the force of the words, which may be capable of several Senses, be so certainly and demonstratively determined to any one sense (by us, who did not see what was done in those days) as to avoid all possible Cavils of contentious men.

This has occasioned those disputes concerning Infant Baptism, the several Orders and Degrees of Church Governours, the Rites and Ceremonies of Religious Worship, and the like. Those who lived in those days, and saw what the Apostles did in these matters, could not doubt of these things, though it were not in expresse words said, that Infants should be baptized with their Parents, or that Bishops are a superiour Order to Presbyters, and Presbyters to Deacons, or that it is lawful for the Governours of the Church to institute and appoint some significant Rites and Ceremonies, for the more decent and orderly Administration of Religious Offices. But because there is not a precise and punctual account given of these matters, in the Writings of the Apostles, which there was no need of then, when these things were obvious to their very Senses, some perverse and unreasonable Disputers, who obstinately reject all other

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Evidence, will judge of these things just as they please themselves, and alter their Opinions and Fancies, as often as they please.

But now if there be any certain way to know, what the practice of the Apostles was in these Cases, this is the best Comment we can possibly have on such Texts, as are not sufficiently plain and express without it. Now methinks any reasonable man must acknowledge, that the best way to understand the Practice of the Apostles, is from the Practice of the Catholick Church in succeeding Ages, especially while the memory of the Apostles was fresh, and the Church Governed by Apostolical men; when we cannot reasonably suspect any Deviation from the Primitive Practice; and this is the Rule which the Church of *England* owns in such matters, and by which she rejects and confutes both the Innovations and Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*, and the wild pretences of Fanaticism.

So that we do in the most proper sense own the Belief and Practice of the Primitive Church, to be the best means for Expounding Scripture. We do not leave every man to Expound Scripture by a private Spirit, as our Adversaries of the Church of *Rome* reproach us; we adhere to the ancient Catholick Church, which the Church of *Rome* on one side, and the Fanaticks on the other, have forsaken: And though we reject the new invention of an infallible Judge, yet we are no Friends at all to Scepticism, but can give a more Rational account of our Faith, than the Church of *Rome* can.

Had we no other way of understanding the sense of Scripture, but by Propriety of the Language, and the Grammatical Construction of the Words, and the scope and design of the Texts, their Connexion and Dependence on what goes before, and what follows, and such like means as we use for the understanding any other Books of humane Composition; I doubt not, but honest and diligent Inquirers might discover the true meaning of Scripture, in all the great Articles of our Faith; but yet this alone is a more uncertain way, and lyable to the Abuses of Hereticks and Impostors. The *Socinians* are a famous Example, what Wit and Criticism will do to pervert the plainest Texts; and some other Sectaries are as plain a demonstration, what work Dulness and Stupidity, and Enthusiasm will make with Scripture; but when we have the practice of the Catholick Church, and an ancient and venerable summary of the Christian Faith,

Faith, which has been the common Faith of Christians in all Ages, to be our Rule in Expounding Scripture, though we may after all, mistake the sence of some particular Texts, yet we cannot be guilty of any great and dangerous mistakes.

This use the Church of *England* makes of the Catholick Church, in Expounding Scripture, that she Religiously maintains the ancient Catholick Faith, and will not suffer any man to Expound Scriptures in opposition to the ancient Faith and Practice of the Catholick Church.

But though the Belief and Practice of the Catholick Church be the best means of understanding the true sence of Scripture, yet we cannot affirm this of any particular Church, or of the Church of any particular Age, excepting the Apostolick Age, or those Ages which immediately succeeded the Apostles. Notwithstanding this, the Church of *Rome* may be no good Expositor of Scriptures; for the Church of *Rome*, though she usurp the name of the Catholick Church, as presuming her self to be the Head and Fountain of Catholick Unity, yet she is but a part of the Catholick Church, as the Church of *England*, and the Churches of *France* and *Holland* are; and has no more right to impose her Expositions of Scripture upon other Churches, than they have to impose upon her. If there happen any Controversie between them, it is not the Authority of either Church can decide it, but this must be done by an appeal to Scripture, and the sence of the Catholick Church in the first and purest Ages of it.

For when we say, that the Belief and Practice of the Catholick Church is the best means to find out the true sence of Scripture, we do not mean that the Church is the soveraign and absolute Judge of the sence of Scripture; but the meaning is, that those Churches which were founded by the Apostles, and received the Faith immediately from them, and were afterwards, for some Ages, governed by Apostolical men, or those who were taught by them, and convers'd with them, are the best Witnesses what the Doctrine of the Apostles was, and therefore as far as we can be certain, what the Faith of these Primitive Churches was, they are the best Guides for the Expounding Scripture.

So that the Authority of the Church in Expounding Scripture being onely the Authority of Witnesses, it can reach no farther than those Ages, which may reasonably be presumed to be Authentick and Credible Witnesses of the Doctrine of the Apostles, and therefore if we extend it to the four first General

Councils, it is as far as we can do it with any pretence of Reason ; and thus far the Church of *England* owns the Authority of the Church, and commands her Ministers to Expound the Scriptures according to the Catholick Faith, owned and profess'd in those days ; but as for the latter Ages of the Church, which were removed too far from the Apostles days, to be Witnesses of their Doctrine, they have no more Authority in this matter, than we have at this day, nor has one Church any more Authority than another.

3. And therefore, if by the Church being the means of knowing the sense and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, be understood the Judgment and Sentence, and Decree of the Church, that we must seek no farther for the reason of our Faith, than the infallible Authority of the Church, in Expounding Scripture, this also is absolutely false and absurd.

This is more than Christ and his Apostles assumed to themselves, while they were on Earth ; they were indeed infallible Interpreters of Scripture, but yet they never bore down their Hearers meerly with their Authority, but Expounded the Scriptures, and applied ancient Prophecies to their Events, and took the Vail off of *Moses's* Face, and shewed them the Gospel-state concealed under those Types and Figures ; they confirmed their Expositions of Scripture by the force of Reason, and appealed to the Judgments and Consciences of their Hearers, whether these things were not so ; Christ commands the *Jews* not meerly to take his own word, and to rely on his Authority for the truth of what he said, but to study the Scriptures themselves ; and the *Bereans* are commended for this generous temper of mind, that they were more noble than those of *Thessalonica*, for they daily searcht the Scriptures, to see whether the Doctrine the Apostles preach'd were to be found there or not ? Now I think no Church can pretend to be more infallible than Christ and his Apostles, and therefore, certainly ought not to assume more to themselves than they did ; and if the Church of *Rome*, or any other Church, will convince us of the truth of their Expositions of Scripture, as Christ and his Apostles convinc'd their Hearers, that is, by inlightning our Understandings, and convincing our Judgments by proper Arguments, we will gladly learn of them.

This course the Primitive Christians took, as is evident in all the Writings of the ancient Fathers against *Jews* and *Hereticks* ;
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they argue from the Scriptures themselves to prove what the sense of Scripture is ; they appeal indeed sometimes to the sense of the Catholick Church, not as an infallible Judge of Scripture, but as the best Witnesses of the Apostolical Doctrine : Thus *Tertullian* argues against Hereticks, in his Book *De Prescriptionibus* ; but when they reason about the sense of Scripture, they never direct us to any infallible Judge, but use such Arguments, as they think proper to convince Gain-sayers.

Nay, this is the way which was observed in all the ancient Councils ; the Bishops of the Church met together for Common Counsel and Advice, and in matters of Discipline and Government, which were subject to their Authority, they considered what was most for the publick benefit of the Church, and determined them by their Authority, not as infallible Judges, but as supreme Governours of the Church. In the Disputes of Faith, they reason from Scripture, and the sense of the Catholick Church, not from their own Authority ; and what upon a serious debate and inquiry they found to be most agreeable to the sense of Scripture, and the Doctrine of the Church of former Ages, that they determined and decreed to be received in all Churches, as the Catholick Faith. That this is so, is evident from all the Histories of the most ancient and celebrated Councils, which any man may consult, who pleases.

Now I would ask some few Questions about this matter.

1. Whether these Councils took a sure and safe way to find out Truth ? If they did not, what reason have we to believe that they determined right ? If they did, then we may use the same way which they did : for that which is a good way in one Age, is so another, and then there is no necessity of an Infallible Judge to find out the sense of Scripture, because we have other certain ways of doing this ; the same which all the ancient Councils observed.

2. I would know, whether it be not sufficient for every Christian to receive the Decrees and Determinations of these Councils, upon the same Reason and Authority which moved the Fathers assembled in Council to make these Decrees ? Whether, for instance, we must not believe the Eternal God-head of Christ, and that he is of the same substance with his Father, for the same Reasons for which the *Nicene* Fathers believed this, and required all Christians to believe it ? If we must, then Scripture, and the sense of the Catholick Church, not the Authority

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of a General Council, or any Infallible Judge, is the Reason of our Faith ; For the *Nicene* Fathers, who were the first that met in a General Council, could not believe this, upon the Authority of any other General Council, much less upon their own Authority ; unless we will say, that they first decreed this, then believed it, because they themselves decreed it. If Scripture, and the sense of the Catholick Church, antecedently to the determinations of a General Council, or any other pretended Infallible Judge, be not a sufficient foundation for our Faith, then the whole Christian World, before the Council of *Nice*, which was the first General Council, had no sufficient foundation for their Faith ; for there was no particular Bishop or Church in those days, which pretended to be the Infallible Interpreter of Scriptures. We Protestants have the same way to understand the Scriptures, have the same Reason and Foundation of our Faith, which the *Nicene* Fathers themselves had, or which any Christian could have, before there was any General Council ; and if the Church of *Rome* do not think this enough, we cannot help that, we are abundantly satisfied with it.

The Authority of a General Council in those days, was deservedly sacred and venerable, not as an Infallible Judge, which they never pretended to, but as the most certain means they could possibly have to understand what was, and in all Ages had been the received Doctrine of the Catholick Church. They met together not to make new Articles of Faith, which no Council in the World ever had any Authority to do, but to declare what was the truly ancient and Apostolick Faith ; and to put it into such words as might plainly express the Catholick sense, and meet with the Distempers of that Age.

For this end Grave and Reverend Bishops assembled from all parts of the Christian World, not merely to give their private Opinions of things, but to declare what was the received Doctrine of those Churches over which they presided ; and I know no better Argument of an Apostolick Tradition, than the consent of all Churches, as remote from each other as East and West, which were planted by several Apostles, and differed very much from each other, in some External Rites and Usages, but yet all agreed in the same Faith. And this is the true Authority of those ancient Councils, that they were most likely to understand the true sense of Scripture, and of the Catholick Church. This is the Protestant Resolution of Faith, and the *Nicene* Fathers them-

themselves had no other way, nor pretended to any other.

Nay, the Church of *Rome* her self, as much as she talks of Infallibility, makes very little use of it. She has never given us an infallible Comment on Scripture, but suffers her Doctors to write as fallible Comments, and in many things as contrary to each other, as any Protestant Divines do: And I cannot imagine what good Infallibility does, if an infallible Church has no better means of understanding Scripture, than the Comments of fallible men; that is, no better means than every fallible Church has: for no man can understand the Scripture ever the better for the Churches being infallible, unless this infallible Church improve this glorious Talent of Infallibility in Expounding Scripture; which she has not done to this day, and I believe never will.

Indeed it is apparent, that infallibility, as it is pretended to by the Church of *Rome*, can be of no use, either in the Resolution of Faith, or in Confuting Hereticks, who deny this Infallibility; and then I cannot imagine what it is good for, but to multiply Disputes, instead of ending them.

As for the Resolution of Faith; suppose I ask a Papist, Why he believes such Articles, as the Divinity of Christ, or the Resurrection of the dead, to be contained in Scripture? If he answers, as he must do, Because he is taught so by the Church, which is infallible: my next Question is, How he knows the Church to be infallible? If he says he learns this from Scripture, I ask him how he comes to understand the Scripture, and how he knows that this is the sense of it? If he knows this by the infallible interpretation of the Church, then he runs round in a Circle, and knows the Scripture by the Church, and the Church by the Scripture, as I observed before; if he can find out the Churches Infallibility by the Scripture, without the help of an infallible Judge, then it seems the Scripture is to be understood without the infallible interpretation of the Church; and if men can find out infallibility in Scripture without the Church, I am confident they may find out any thing else in Scripture as well, without the Churches Infallibility: For there is no Article of our Creed so hard to be found there, as the Churches Infallibility is. But however that be, after all this boast of Infallibility, a Papist has no more infallible Foundation for his Faith, than a Protestant has, nor half so much. We believe the Articles of the Christian Faith, because we find them plainly taught in
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Scripture, and universally received as the sense of Scripture by the Catholick Church in the best and purest Ages of it: A Papist believes the Church to be infallible, because he thinks he finds it in Scripture, though the Catholick Church for many Ages never found it there, and the greatest part of the Christian Church to this day cannot find it there: Now if they will but allow, that a Protestant (though a poor fallible Creature) may reason about the sense of Scripture, as well as a Papist, and that the Evidence of reason is the same to both, then we Protestants stand upon as firm ground as the Papists here, and are at least as certain of all those Doctrines of Faith, which we find in the Scripture, and are ready to prove by it, as they are of their Churches infallibility; but then we have an additional Security, that we expound the Scriptures right, which they want; and that is the Doctrine and Practice of the Primitive Church, which confirms all the Articles of our Faith, and Rules of Worship and Discipline, but gives not the least intimation, that the Pope or Church of *Rome* was thought infallible by them, and if the Primitive Church was ignorant of this, which is the best witness of Apostolical Tradition, it is most probable, that no such thing is contained in Scripture, though some mercenary Flatterers of the Pope have endeavoured to persuade the World, that they found it there.

So that we have a greater assurance of all the Articles of our Religion, from Scripture and Catholick Tradition, than a Papist can have of the Churches Infallibility, and yet he can have no greater assurance of any other Doctrines of Religion, which he believes upon the Churches Infallibility, than he has of Infallibility it self. So that in the last Resolution of Faith, the Protestant has much the advantage of the Papist, for the Protestant resolves his Faith into the Authority of the Scriptures, Expounded by the Doctrine and Practice of the Primitive Church, the Papists resolves his into the Infallibility of the Church, which he finds out only by Expounding Scripture by a private Spirit, without the Authority of any Church, but that whose Authority is under dispute.

And as the Doctrine of Infallibility is of no use in the last Resolution of Faith, so it is wholly useless in disputing with such Hereticks as we are; who deny Infallibility: for it is a vain thing to attempt to impose any absurd, or groundless, and uncatholick Doctrines upon us, by the Churches infallible Authority, who believe there is no such infallible Judge; but are resolved

solved to trust our own Eyes, and to adhere to Scripture and the Catholick Faith of the Primitive Church in these matters.

And therefore the great Advocates for the Church of *Rome*, are forced to take the same course in confuting Heresies, as they call them, that we do: They alledge the Authority of Scripture, the Authority of Fathers and Councils, to justify their Innovations, and here we willingly joyn issue with them, and are ready to prove, That Scripture and all true Antiquity is on our side, and this has been often and unanswerably proved by the Learned Patrons of the Reformation.

But there are some very material things to be observed from hence, for our present purpose. For either they think this a good way to prove what they intend, and to convince Gain-sayers by the Authority of Scripture, and Primitive Antiquity, or they do not. If they do not think this a good way, to what purpose are there so many Volumes of Controversie written? Why do they produce Scripture, and Fathers, and Councils, to justify the Usurpations of their Church, and these new Additions they have made to the Christian Faith and Worship? if this be not a good way to convince Hereticks, why do they give themselves and us such an impertinent trouble?

If this be a good way, then we are in a good way already; we take that very way for our satisfaction, which by their own Confession and Practice, is a very proper means for the Conviction of Hereticks, and to discover the Truth, and after the most diligent inquiries we can make, we are satisfied that the Truth is on our side.

If the Authority of Scripture signifie any thing in this matter, then it seems Hereticks, who reject the Authority of an Infallible Judge, may understand Scripture without an Infallible Interpreter, by the Exercise of Reason and Judgment in studying of them, otherwise why do they pretend to expound Scripture to us, and to convince us by Reason and Argument, what the true sense of Scripture is.

If the Authority of the Primitive Church, and first Christian Writers, be considerable, (as they acknowledge it is, by their appeals to them) then at least, the present Pope or Church, is not the sole infallible Judge of Controversies, unless they will say, that we must not judge of the Doctrine or Practice of the Primitive Church, by ancient Records, (and then *Baronius* his Annals are worth nothing) but by the Judgment and Practice of the present Church.

The sum is this: There is great reason to suspect, that the Church of *Rome* her self, does not believe her own Infallibility, no more than we Protestants do: for if she does, she ought not to suffer her Doctors to dispute with Hereticks, from any other Topick, but her own Authority; when they vie Reasons and Arguments with us, and dispute from Scripture and Antiquity: they appeal from the infallibility of the present Church, to every mans private Reason and Judgment, as much as any Protestant does: and if the Articles of the Christian Faith may be establish'd by Scripture and Antiquity, without an infallible Judge, as they suppose they may be, by their frequent attempts to do it; this plainly overthrows the necessity of an infallible Judge. In a word, not to take notice now how weak and groundless this pretence of Infallibility is, it is evident that it is a very useless Doctrine: for those who believe the Churches Infallibility, have no greater assurance of their Faith, than we have, who do not believe it; and those who do not believe the Churches Infallibility, can never be confuted by it. So that it can neither establish any mans Faith, nor confute any Heresies; that is, it is of no use at all.

The Church of *England* reverences the Authority of the Primitive Church, as the best Witness of the Apostolical Faith and Practice, but yet resolves her Faith at last into the Authority of the Scriptures. She receives nothing for an Article of Faith, which she does not find plainly enough taught in Scripture, but it is a great confirmation of her interpretation of Scripture, that the Primitive Church owned the same Doctrines which she does; and she looks upon it as a just prejudice against any Expositions of Scripture, if they contradict the common Faith of the first Christians: and therefore when the words of Scripture are fairly capable of different senses, she chuses that sense which is most agreeable with the Catholick Faith, and practice of the Primitive Church; but should any Doctrines be imposed upon her, as Articles of Faith, which are no where to be found in Scripture, or which are plainly contrary to it, (as the new *Trent-Creed* is) whatever pretence there be for the Antiquity of such Doctrines, she utterly rejects them; she will not put out her own Eyes to follow any other Guide; and thanks be to God, she needs not reject any truly Catholick Doctrine in this way. We still retain the Faith of the Primitive Church, and are greatly confirmed in it, from that admirable consent there is between the

the Scriptures, as Expounded by us, and that Faith which was anciently owned and received by all Christians.

Having thus shewn in what sence the Church is the Interpreter of Scripture, I proceed now to the second thing contained in this Paper, That this Church must be known to be the true Church, by its continual visible succession from Christ till our days. Now these few words contain a great many, and very great mistakes. The subject of the Inquiry is, how we may find out such a Church, whose word we may safely take for the true sence and meaning of Scripture.

Now, 1. The Author of this Paper, whether ignorantly, or designedly, I know not, alters the state of the Question, and instead of a Church, which is an unerring and infallible Interpreter of Scripture, which would be very well worth finding, he tells us how we may know a true Church; now I take a true Church, and an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, to be very different things. A Church may be guilty of Schism and Heresie, and yet may be a true Church, though not a sound, Orthodox, and Catholick Church: for a true Church is such a Church as has all things necessary, and essential to the Being and Constitution of a Church; this a Church may have, and superadd other things which are destructive of the Christian Faith, and very dangerous and fatal mistakes; as we believe, and are able to prove the Church of *Rome* has done: and yet we acknowledge her a true Church, because she retains the true Christian Faith, though miserably corrupted by Additions of her own, as a man is a true man, though he be sick of a mortal Disease. Now if a true Church may corrupt the Christian Faith, we have no reason to rely on the Authority of every true Church, for the true sence and meaning of Scripture.

2. Let us suppose, that by a true Church, he means an Infallible Church, whose Authority we may safely rely on in Expounding Scriptures; this Church, he says, is to be known by a continual visible succession from Christ, till our days: Now if this visible uninterrupted succession be the mark of such a true Church, as is an infallible Interpreter of Scripture; then, 1. The *Greek Church*, as an infallible Interpreter of Scripture: for she has as visible and uninterrupted a succession from Christ and his Apostles to this day, as the Church of *Rome* has; and so we have two infallible Churches (not to instance in any more at present, who have as good a succession as either of them) which

are directly opposite to each other ; and what shall we do in this case ? Must we believe Contradictions, or must we dis-believe infallible Churches ?

2. If a visible succession from Christ and his Apostles, makes any Church an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, then all the Churches which were planted by the Apostles, were infallible. All the Churches which were planted by the Apostles, have an equally-visible succession from Christ ; those Churches which were planted by the Apostles, may be presumed as Infallible, while the Apostles were present with them, as they were afterwards ; and those Churches which succeeded these Apostolical Churches, at the distance of an Age or two, may be supposed as infallible as any Church of this Age is : for if a visible succession from Christ makes a Church infallible, why should not a succession of a hundred or two hundred years, make them as infallible as a succession of sixteen hundred years ? unless they think that Infallibility increases with the Age of the Church, which I could wish true, but we see very little sign of it. Now according to these Principles, all the Churches which were planted by the Apostles, and have a continual visible succession from Apostolical Churches, through all Ages, since the time of the Apostles, must be infallible : for if a continual visible succession confers Infallibility, and is the mark whereby we must know it, then every Church which ever had, or has to this day this visible succession, must have Infallibility also, which, it seems, is entailed on succession. And thus we have found out a World of Infallibility, and it is wonderful how any Apostolical Church came to be over-run with so many Errours and Heresies, and to grow so corrupt and degenerate, as to provoke God to root them up ; if every Apostolical Church was infallible, I cannot imagine how whole Churches, which visibly succeeded the Apostles, should be infected with Heresie : for if Infallibility it self will not secure a Church from Heresie, the Lord have mercy upon us.

3. This mark he gives how to find out such a true Church as is an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, viz. A continual visible succession from Christ till this day, includes another great mistake : for it supposes, that there is some Church now in being, on whose Authority we must rely for the sense of Scripture ; for otherwise there can be no use of a visible succession to this day, in this Controversie : If, as I have already proved at large, we must rely onely on the Authority of the Primitive Church,

not of the Church of this present Age, for the sence of Scripture, and that not as an infallible Judge, but as the most Authentick Witness of the Apostolical Doctrine and Practice, then we cannot find out this Church by a visible succession to this day, but by examining the ancient Records of the Primitive Church, where we shall find what the Faith and Practice of the Church in those days was, which is the safest Rule to guide us in the Exposition of Scripture. Though there were no Church in the World at this day, which could prove a continual visible succession from Christ and his Apostles, yet while we have the Scriptures, and the Records of the Primitive Church, we have very sufficient means for the understanding the true meaning of Scripture: so that of whatever use this talk of a continual visible succession may be in other cases, it is wholly impertinent in this. A Church which cannot prove such a continual visible succession which was not founded by any Apostle, or Apostolical men, or has lost the Memory or Records of its first Plantation, may yet have very certain means of knowing the true sence of Scripture, from the Scripture it self, and the Doctrine and Practice of Apostolical and Primitive Churches, and a Church which has the most visible uninterrupted succession from Christ and his Apostles, may be so far from being an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, that she may be very corrupt and erroneous her self, if she forsake the Apostolical Tradition contained in the Writings of the New Testament, and Expounded by the Catholick Faith and Practice of the first Churches; as we know the Church of *Rome* has done; which is so far from being an infallible Church, that we believe her to be the most corrupt Church in the World.

And thus I think we are prepared to venture upon the last Clause of this Paper, wherein the whole force of the Argument, such as it is, is turned upon the poor Protestant Churches. But I doubt (says the Author of this Paper) whether or no the Protestant Church can make out this continual visible succession, and desire to be informed. The sting of which Argument lies in this, that we Protestants have no certain way of knowing the true sence and meaning of Scripture, because we cannot prove the continual visible succession of our Church, from Christ unto this day; and therefore we ought to go over to the Church of *Rome*, who has this visible succession, and receive all her Dictates as infallible Oracles. But, for Answer to this, consider,

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1. That suppose the Protestant Church could not make out such a continual visible succession, yet we may understand the Scriptures very well without it, and need not go to the Church of *Rome* to Expound Scripture for us, as I have already shewn at large. Had he proved that we had been no Church, for want of a visible succession of Church-Officers, or that our Religion were a Novelty, which was never heard of in the World before *Luther*, this had been something more to the purpose; but to pretend that we cannot understand the Scriptures, for want of a visible succession, is such a loose and inconsequent way of reasoning, as a poor fallible Protestant would be ashamed of.

2. But pray, why can't the Protestant Church of *England* prove her continual visible succession from Christ till this day, as well as the Church of *Rome*? Here was a Christian Church planted in this Nation, as very good Historians say, as early as at *Rome*, and it has continued here ever since, to this day: when *Austin* the Monk came over to *England*, he found here a company of resolute *British* Bishops and Monks, who would not submit to the Usurpations of *Rome*, and the *English* and *British* Churches under several Changes and Alterations, have continued to this day, with a visible succession of Christian Bishops; and what better succession can *Rome* shew than this?

I suppose no *Roman* Catholick will disown the succession of the Church of *England*, till the Reformation, and I pray, how came we to lose our succession then? Did the Reformation of those Abuses and Corruptions, which had crept into the Church, unchurch us? Just as much as a man ceases to be the same man, when he is cured of some mortal Disease: Did not the Church of *England* consist of the same Persons, before the Reformation and after? A great many indeed disowned the Reformation; but were not at all those Persons, who were so active and zealous in the Reformation, formerly of the *Roman* Communion? And did they lose their succession too, when they became Reformers? When a Church consists of the same Bishops, Priests, and People, which she had before, though she have not all the same that she had; when she retains the same ancient Catholick and Apostolick Faith, which she did before, onely renounces some Errours and Innovations, which she owned before, how does this forfeit her succession? The Church of *England* is the very same Church now, since the Reformation, which she was before, and therefore has the very same succession,

cession, though not the same Errours, to this day, that ever she had ; and that, I think, is as good a succession as the Church of *Rome* has.

There are but two things to be considered in the case of Succession : Either a succession of Church-Officers, or a succession of the Faith and Doctrines of the Church.

1. As for a succession of Church-Officers, we have the same that the Church of *Rome* has. Those *English* Bishops who embraced the Reformation, received their Orders in the Communion of the Church of *Rome*, and therefore they had as good Orders, as any are in the Church of *Rome* ; and these were the Persons, who Consecrated other Bishops, and so in succession to this day. For as for the story of the Nags-Head Ordination, that is so transparent a Forgery, invented many years after, to reproach the Reformation, that I presume no sober *Roman* Catholic will insist on it.

But we are Hereticks and Schismatics, and this forfeits our Orders, and our Succession together. But, 1. This Charge ought first to be proved against us, that we are Hereticks and Schismatics, we deny and abhor both the name and thing ; and if we be not Hereticks, and Schismatics, as we are sure we are not, and as the Church of *Rome* can never prove us to be, then according to their own Confession, our Orders must be good.

2. However, be we Hereticks, or Schismatics, or whatever they please to call us, how does this destroy our Orders and Succession ? The Catholic Church would not allow in former Ages, that Heresie or Schism destroyed the validity of Orders. St. *Jerome* disputes against this at large, in his Book *Contra Luciferianos*. And St. *Austin* allows the *Donatists* Bishops to have valid Orders, though they were Schismatics, and therefore that the Sacraments administered by them, were valid. And indeed, if Heresie will destroy Orders and Succession, the Church of *Rome* will be as much to seek for their Orders and Succession, as we are, which, by their own Confession, have had several Heretical Popes, and no body knows how many Bishops Ordained by them.

2. As for succession of Doctrine, which is as considerable to the full, as succession of Orders, the great Articles of our Faith are not onely plainly contained in Scripture, but have been delivered down to us, through all Ages of the Church, by an uninterrupted Succession.

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The Church of *Rome* her self, in her greatest Degeneracy, did own all that we do in pure matters of Faith: When we reformed the Church we did not make a new Religion, but only separated the old Faith from new and corrupt Additions; and therefore the quarrel of the Church of *Rome* with us, is not that we believe any thing which they do not believe, but that we do not believe all that they would have us.

The Doctrine of the Church of *England* is truly Primitive and Catholick, taught by Christ and his Apostles, owned by the Primitive Church, and excepting the Dispute between the *Latin* and *Greek* Church, about the *Filioque*, or the Holy Spirits proceeding from the Father and the Son, received by all Catholick Churches to this day; which is as compleat and perfect Succession, as any Doctrine can have; therefore when the Church of *Rome* asks us, Where was our Religion before *Luther*? We tell them it was all the World over, all Catholick Churches believed what we do, though we do not believe all that they do, they themselves did, and do to this Day, own our Creeds, and Articles of Faith, excepting such of them as are directly opposed to their Innovations.

So that we are on a sure Foundation, our Faith has been received in the Catholick Church in all Ages. But now the Church of *Rome* cannot shew such a Succession for her new Doctrines and Articles of Faith, which were unknown to the Primitive Church for many Ages, which were rejected by many flourishing Churches, since the first appearance of them, which never had a quiet possession in her own Communion, and were never formed into Articles of Faith, till the packt Conventicle of *Trent*.

This I think is a sufficient Answer to this Paper, and it pities me to see so many well-meaning Persons abused with such transparent Sophistry.

F I N I S.